

Hello and—perhaps—goodbye to Bulgaria

John Delaney interview, part two

LESS than a month ago the chances of John Delaney playing for Great Britain in Bulgaria tomorrow (Wednesday) rated highly remote to the point of being positively non-existent, writes Mike Whitesman.

But his apparent reconciliation with team manager, Charles Hughes has altered all that. And Big John flew out to Sofia yesterday alongside the rest of the 16-strong squad, in company with three other Wycombe Wanderers, Ted Powell, Larry Pritchard and Paul Fuschillo.

By adding the towering heading power of Wycombe's skipper, British Olympic aspirations must spiral. The Bulgarians lost 1-0 before a pathetic crowd of 3,000 at Wembley Stadium — capacity 100,000.

In the return, though, it will be a totally different story. Hughes' men face a sell out attendance — 78,000 — all

rooting for their own national side. And their one goal lead will seem less impressive under those circumstances.

But as John proved during his self inflicted exile from the Olympic scene, he takes it all in his stride.

No one will ever know exactly what went on behind the scenes to bring about the events of recent months. It's all in the past now, and John, looking ahead to tomorrow's match seemed confident that Britain can shock the Bulgarians again by returning with at least a draw — which means goodbye Bulgaria if he's right.

Although he missed watching the first leg at Wembley, John is well acquainted with their style of play, having seen them many times on film during

training spells with the squad at Bisham Abbey.

Sofia rates as just another episode in the travels of Wycombe's skipper. Scandinavia, France, Belgium, Holland, West Germany — his passport is marked for all these parts of the globe.

But it is a match in Finland, where Britain's amateurs won 3-1 soon after Sir Alf Ramsey's professionals had beaten the same side 3-0, that John recalls most vividly. "That was the greatest team effort I've ever been associated with," he told me.

The general feeling is that Britain might as well not enter for the Olympics while so many countries — like Bulgaria — play their full national sides, as in the World Cup. There's no

defeatism among the British squad though.

As John says, "We've got some very good amateur players in this country. Our top amateurs are more dedicated than those in any other country. It gives them an edge."

Plagued by injuries, which have kept him off work for so many weeks, and often called upon to travel both for evening games and sometimes days at a time abroad, Big John is lucky enough to have an understanding boss. "Every successful senior amateur footballer must work for a good firm and a good employer because of the time he needs off."

John, in fact, works for a chairmaking firm in High Wycombe, and commutes from his Slough home each day. It does mean, however, he's on the spot for Wanderers' training nights.

Although everyone is trying hard not to let Saturday's rather dismal display against Ilford ruin their celebrations, it did inevitably take an edge off Wanderers' day of glory. But they are champions, and well deserved champs at that.

How long can Wycombe stay at the top? John gives the present squad as it stands about three more seasons which would run about parallel with the Enfield trophy-hunting machine of Tommy Lawrence's day.

But he sees everything very much the same again next season. Sutton, Hendon and Enfield — plus, possibly St. Albans — will again be the ones to keep a close watch on. "The Saints can be such a good side, but they throw away some silly points," he said.

But, while on the subject of throwing things away, what about the 3-0 Amateur Cup defeat by Skelmersdale? "It was sickening. I can't describe the disappointment, especially when drawn at home in front of 10,000."

Indeed, despite his travels abroad, John maintains one particularly strong wish — to make a far shorter journey . . . stopping at Wembley Stadium.

With a better Cup temperament the Blues might have been there this year, instead of Skelmersdale. For as John points out: "Last season Wanderers got 61 points, this season we got 62. It shows we are a very good side, and it shows a very high level of consistency."

A final note . . . although he missed the Berks and Bucks Senior Cup Final last Wednesday, John will still get his chance to break his County Cup Final jinx, as mentioned in part one last week.

Unless he sustains an injury in the meantime, he will almost certainly be leading the Blues out against Slough in the replay at Marlow next Monday. Obviously, someone took my words seriously when, last week, I suggested he'll have to be stranded out on a desert island to keep him from playing.

Unfortunately the cut over his eye did not heal in time — shangh-eye-d perhaps?